

# **Wacky Garden Helpers**

**from Your Kitchen!**



**53 Ways to  
Feed Your Soil,  
Pamper Your  
Plants, and Drive  
Away Pests**

A yellow banana with its peel partially removed, showing the curved shape of the fruit.

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# Put On Your Magic Glasses

**T**ake a look around your kitchen. Most of the things you see probably serve some practical purpose in your family's daily life. Now pretend you're putting on a pair of magic glasses. These glasses let you see things in your kitchen that can be just as practical and useful in your garden as they are in your house.

The longer you look through your magic glasses, the more items you'll see in your kitchen that can help you become more successful in your garden. Take a peek in your cleaning closet—it probably contains some good garden-friendly stuff, too.

Once you start wearing magic glasses, you may never take them off. Each new discovery of an ordinary household item that does extraordinary things in the garden will inspire you to keep searching for the next great kitchen-to-garden transplant.

Use this booklet as your first pair of magic glasses. In it you'll find dozens of tips for transforming everyday kitchen clutter into plant-boosting, timesaving, problem-solving tools to make your garden better than it's ever been.

## CHAPTER 1

# Food to Egg Your Garden On

**N**ourish your garden the way you nourish your family—with a heaping helping of home cooking. That doesn't mean serving up pot roast and mashed potatoes to your peas and posies: Kitchen castoffs such as peelings and cooled cooking water are the types of menu items that will have your plants asking for seconds. "People food" can benefit your garden in other ways, too—read on to see how!

### Go Bananas for Your Roses

Roses love potassium, and banana peels are an oh-so-easy-to-apply organic source of the essential nutrient. There's no need to get fancy when applying this tropical treat: Lay the peels on the ground at the base of

the rosebush about 2 to 4 inches away from the stem. Gardeners who have tried this trick report no problems with insects or critters being attracted to the peels.

### Clever Cover-Ups for Compost-Bound Scraps

One deterrent to composting year-round is that people want the kitchen garbage out of sight (and scent) as quickly as possible. Dedicated compost makers have devised all sorts of ways for holding food waste until it's time to take it out for composting. Here are just a few.

**Containers on the counter.** Cookie jars, decorative pots, large pitchers, an unused bread box, or a canister set all make great countertop containers for food scraps. If the

### RECYCLE THIS!

## Grounds for Garden Success

If you work in an office building, take advantage of something that usually gets dumped in the trash—coffee grounds. Find out where the coffeemakers are in your building, and leave a 3-pound covered tin marked "Used Grounds." Make the rounds routinely, and take home all that potential black gold. (Don't worry about removing any paper coffee filters because they will decompose along with the grounds.) If you're composting ashes from a wood stove or fireplace, mildly acidic coffee grounds are an extra-good compost addition to balance the alkalinity of the ashes.

container is airtight, it won't smell until you open it; dump it frequently, though, since the anaerobic conditions make a powerful odor. **Containers near the door.** Camouflage the compost-in-waiting by putting it in bags or milk cartons that you stash in wicker bins, decorated milk cans, large tins, or even an umbrella stand.

#### **Outside, waiting for the final trip.**

Stash compostables in an old milk box, or a window box or flower planter that is not in use during winter. Once the material is frozen, it has no odor and there's no hurry to bury it; just wait for some temperate days and add a whole compost layer at once. If the compost ingredients are really wet, add shredded newspaper with every addition to absorb some of the moisture.

#### **An “Eggs-cellent” Solution for Houseplants**

Don't dump the water from boiled eggs down the drain. Cool it off and give your houseplants a drink or share it with your outdoor plants. You can also put eggshells (whether from eggs you boiled or cracked into recipes) to good use. Boil the empty shells and let them sit overnight in the water. After straining out the shells, use the cooled water on plants in need of a drink. Add the shells to your compost pile or crush them and sprinkle them on the soil around garden plants. The eggshell water contains modest amounts of calcium and potassium for your plants to enjoy. The shells, which are mostly calcium, break down very slowly and serve as a long-lasting source of organic matter in the soil. The pointy edges of the crushed shells may deter slugs and snails from slithering over the soil.

#### **Recycle Your Cooking Water**

Use the water from steamed vegetables, cooled down, to water your potted plants.

Just keep a plastic bucket on hand in your kitchen. When you're done steaming the veggies, pour the water into the bucket instead of down the drain. When dinner is over, the nutrient-filled water will be cool, and you can make the rounds of your houseplants or outdoor containers.

Depending on what you've had for dinner, your plants may enjoy a real nutrient boost. If daily doses of after-dinner cooking water are leaving your plants waterlogged, don't go back to dumping the water down the drain. Compost needs water, too—just dump the cooled liquid right into your bin or use it to rinse out your kitchen scrap collection pail when you empty it into the pile.

#### **Squirt Small Seeds**

Instead of planting tiny seeds individually, mix them in a gel solution, and squirt them down the plant row. Mix one package of plain (unflavored) gelatin with 1 tablespoon of warm water, and stir until it's dissolved. Add water sparingly until the mixture is thick enough so the tiny seeds don't sink and thin enough so the mixture flows evenly through a pull-top detergent bottle. You may need to



A pull-top bottle and a gelatinous mixture of seeds, gelatin, and water let you squirt tiny seeds into nice even rows. The gelatin helps keep the seeds moist, too, for improved germination.

## **Hello Jell-O Seed Starter**

To get flower and vegetable seeds off to a disease-free start, try a sweet approach. Sprinkle the seeds with Jell-O powder. You can also feed young plants with Jell-O as they grow.

#### **Peat pots**

#### **Potting soil**

#### **Seeds**

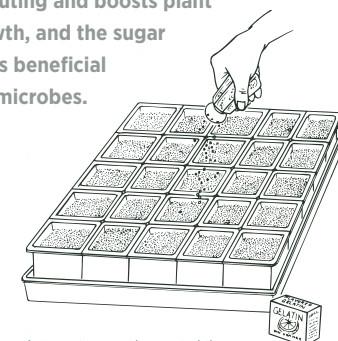
#### **1 package of Jell-O powder, any flavor with sugar**

#### **Powdered skim milk, in amount equal to Jell-O (optional)**

#### **Saltshaker or other sprinkling device**

#### **Newspaper**

**Sprinkle seeds or seedlings with flavored gelatin powder. The nitrogen in the gelatin speeds sprouting and boosts plant growth, and the sugar feeds beneficial soil microbes.**



1. Fill the peat pots with potting soil, and place two seeds in each pot.
2. Fill the saltshaker with the Jell-O powder (and powdered skim milk, if desired, for extra calcium), and sprinkle lightly on top. Gently press down the powder, and cover lightly with soil.
3. Moisten the soil, and cover it with damp newspaper.
4. After 4 days, remove the newspaper, and keep the seeds in a warm area with temperatures of 55° to 65°F.

experiment with the number of seeds in the solution to get a nice uniform flow of seeds when you “plant” your rows.

#### **Sow Small Seeds Southern-Style**

Sometimes seeds are so little that they're nearly impossible to sow evenly without spreading them too thickly. Mix dry grits, a breakfast staple in the South, with tiny seeds such as lettuce, mustard, and onion to thin them out, then run the seed-and-grits combo through your mechanical seeder. The light-colored grits make it easy to see where you've sown, and you'll find that your seedlings are spaced more evenly when they sprout. If you don't use a mechanical seeder, then

sow the mixture by hand. And if you don't have grits handy, try sand instead.

#### **Jell-O Snack Plan for Plants**

After your plants are up and growing, Jell-O can help keep them healthy. Add 1/2 to 1 teaspoon of Jell-O powder to 1 gallon of any organic liquid fertilizer, such as compost tea. Mix well, and use the mixture immediately to prevent thickening. Pour it directly on the soil. Because of possible thickening, you don't want to use a spray bottle with this mixture.

Many adventurous gardeners use Jell-O for their houseplants, but it may do just as much to help fend off fungal diseases in outdoor plants. If you use lemon- or lime-flavored Jell-O, its citrusy odor may also repel some bugs.

## Chapter 2

# Pantry-Based Problem Solvers

**A** whole host of items from your pantry, everything from cast-off containers and fading food-stuffs to spices and seasonings, can be put to use warding off pests that would wreak havoc on your garden. Trap and kill insects, deter diseases, repel pesky critters, and more—everything you need is right there in your cupboard.

### Jug of Doom Spells Insects' Demise

Put a stop to pest problems in your garden with this kitchen concoction that many insects can't resist. This liquid lure smells like a sweet treat to would-be pests of your fruits and veggies, but it's really a trap. For best results, serve it in a plastic jug or deep plastic container with a lid, such as an ice cream bucket. The scent of the liquid will tempt insects to enter the container, where they'll fall to their watery fate.

To make liquid doom, pour 1 cup of sugar and 1 cup of white vinegar into the container. Fill it with water to a couple of inches from the top. Fasten the lid, and shake the mixture well. Open the lid and push in two banana peels. If you're using a jug, keep the lid off and set the jug in the garden. But when using a wide-mouth container, cut a few 1-inch triangular flaps in the lid and bend them back so the insects can get in.



Mix up containers of doom to lure insects away from your fruit crops. The pests will head for the enticing liquid and fall to their watery grave.

### Trap Squash Troubles before They Start

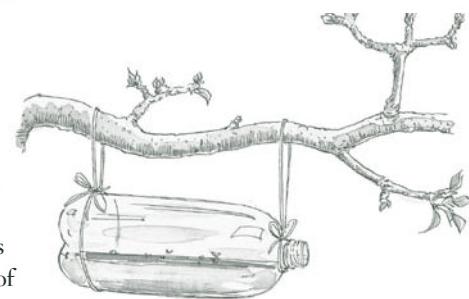
To keep squash vine borers under control, set out a little preventive medicine. Cut a big hole in the side of a gallon plastic jug where it slopes upward toward the opening. Put about a quart of water, 3 to 4 tablespoons of molasses, and a little vinegar in the bottom. Set the jugs out amid your vine crops—squash, melons, and cukes—when the plants are blooming. The molasses solution traps the moths that lay the eggs that grow into destructive squash vine borers.

### Suspended Soda Bottles Stop Moths

Coddling moths, whose larvae ruin apples and pears by tunneling through the fruits, are fond of sipping sweet molasses mixed with vinegar. Hang soda bottle traps filled with 1 cup of molasses and 1/2 gallon of vinegar in the branches of your fruit trees to invite egg-laying adult moths in for a final drink. Once inside the bottle, moths can't escape and they drown in the drink instead of flitting off to lay eggs on developing fruit.

To make the traps, gather a few 1- or 2-liter clear plastic soda bottles—enough so you can hang one or two traps per tree. Blend the molasses and vinegar thoroughly, and put just enough of the solution into each bottle so that it doesn't spill when you lay the bottle on its side. (Bottles vary, but you'll need from 1 to 2 cups per bottle.)

Before your trees begin to bloom, hang the solution-filled bottles from the branches, suspending them horizontally



Prevent codling moths from damaging your apple crop by capturing the moths—before your trees blossom—in homemade soda bottle traps.

### RECYCLE THIS!

## Snag Cucumber Beetles with Old Squash

**S**potted cucumber beetles chew holes in all sorts of vine crops as well as in corn, potatoes, and some fruit crops. Even worse, they can spread serious diseases to your garden. But smart gardeners can put a stop to these troublesome pests early in the season.

If you have winter squash in storage, keep some until spring—even if the squash is getting soft. Scoop out a hole in each squash, and place it by the vulnerable crops soon after planting. Once these traps hold lots of cucumber beetles, gather up the squishy squash along with the pests inside and drop the whole mess into the trash.

with twine tied at the neck and bottom. (Replace the bottle caps while you are hanging the bottles.) Tie one piece of twine tight around the neck of each bottle with enough length to lash it to a branch. Use a second piece of twine in the form of a sling to suspend the lower half of the bottle so that it hangs parallel to the ground. Wind the twine once rather tightly around the bottle helps in windy areas. Remove the caps, and you're ready to catch moths.

### Set 'Em up at the Slug Saloon

Slugs aren't selective when it comes to beer. They'll slither in droves to any brand and don't care whether it's regular, lite, or nonalcoholic. Gardeners weary of slug damage can use this weakness to

their advantage. Set shallow containers, such as jar lids or pie tins, into the soil near affected plants, placing them so their rims are even with the soil surface. Fill the containers with beer before giving each saloon a roof to make it cool and inviting to thirsty slugs. Make the roof from a folded piece of cardboard, a propped paper plate or board, or anything else that shades the beer-filled container while allowing slugs access to the brew.

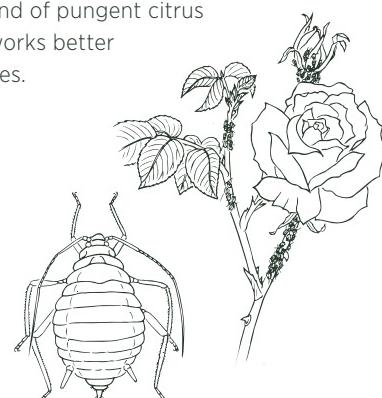
Check your traps every day or two, emptying slug-laden beer into an old bucket and refilling the containers with fresh suds. Look for slugs hanging out on the underside of the roof, too, and scrape them into the bucket along with their beer buddies.

### Citrus Killer for Aphids

Pesky insects go into convulsions when doused with citrus oil extract. It quickly neutralizes aphids and other soft-bodied insects and can temporarily deter ants. Don't worry if you don't have lemons on hand when you need to zap some aphids—use other citrus fruits instead. The rind of pungent citrus such as grapefruit, sour oranges, and limes works better than the rind of navel and other sweet oranges.

**1 pint water**  
**Rind from 1 lemon, grated**  
**Cheesecloth**  
**Pump spray bottle**

1. Bring the water to a boil. Remove from heat, and add the grated lemon rind.
2. Allow the mixture to steep overnight.
3. Strain the mixture through cheesecloth, and pour it into the pump spray bottle.
4. Apply the mixture to plant leaves that are under attack by aphids and other soft-bodied insects. This mixture must come in contact with the insects' bodies to be effective.



Aphids suck plant juices and can cause considerable damage if you don't control them. A safe and simple spray made with lemon rind and water can stop the pests in their tracks.

### Double-Duty Baking Soda Spray

For a proven garden fungus fighter that's cheap, easy, and effective, look no further than your kitchen cabinet. This recipe includes canola oil, which acts as a spreader-sticker to help the baking soda stay on leaves, making the spray more effective. The insecticidal soap in the mix gives plants protection from insect pests, too. If pests aren't a concern, make the recipe without the insecticidal soap. Use this recipe when you have to spray only occasionally—some plants may be injured by repeated applications of oil.

**1½ tablespoons baking soda**  
**1 tablespoon insecticidal soap**  
**1 tablespoon canola oil**  
**1 cup plus 1 gallon water**  
**1 tablespoon vinegar**  
**Backpack or pump sprayer**

1. Mix the baking soda, soap, and oil with 1 cup of water.
2. Add the vinegar last. If it goes in sooner, the mixture may bubble over.
3. Pour the mixture into the sprayer, and add 1 gallon of water. Shake or stir to combine the ingredients.
4. Spray plants, covering the tops and bottoms of the leaves.

NOTE: If you cannot dedicate a sprayer for each garden solution you make, be sure to clean the sprayer thoroughly after each use. If you have used a herbicide in a sprayer, do not use it for any other purpose.



Fight fungal diseases such as black spot and powdery mildew with a baking soda spray that is inexpensive yet effective. Be sure to treat the undersides as well as the tops of leaves.

### Season Your Bulbs with Onion

Many home gardeners report red pepper, black pepper, and onion juice (one of these or a combination) as their favorite repellent for keeping rodents away from bulbs. Sprinkle the bulbs well before planting them, and follow up by sprinkling the soil surface liberally. Sally Jean Cunningham, author of *Great Garden Companions*, says she keeps a cheese grater in her garden tool bucket to use for grinding onion juice on new

plantings. "I never throw away soft onions; I just put on a mask and grate them onto the plants!"

### Scents Say "No!" to Kitty's Nose

When it comes to protecting your spring plantings from digging kitties, take advantage of a cat's sensitive olfactory system. Effective products for keeping cats away include onion sprays, a sprinkling of chopped onions

or chives, and anything strongly perfumed, including the scented inserts from catalogs and magazines.

### Vinegar Spray Keeps Cats Away

Use vinegar to chase away wandering tomcats and neutralize the smell that they leave behind. Fill a spray bottle with white vinegar, and squirt it in the places unwelcome cats frequent. Spray 1 to 2 ounces of vinegar where cats have left their scent and onto stone or concrete surfaces where they're likely to visit. As long as the cats can smell

the vinegar, it works like a fence to keep them away. Avoid spraying undiluted vinegar on your plants, because it can burn the leaves.

### Stop the Rust

Trying to keep rust and dirt off your clean tools? Give them a shot of nonstick cooking spray, such as Pam. After tools have been cleaned and dried following a day in the dirt, spray mist them lightly with nonstick spray and wipe them with a clean, dry cloth to keep them rust free and ready for gardening action on another day.

## Dog-Gone Potion

Deter digging dogs by dousing their favorite digging holes with this pungent potion. You can also use this mixture for treating the soil where you don't want dogs to nap.

**1 clove garlic, chopped  
1 pungent onion, chopped  
1 quart warm water  
1 teaspoon Tabasco sauce  
1 tablespoon cayenne pepper  
1 large plastic or metal pail**

1. Mix all the ingredients together in the pail.
2. Allow the mixture to steep overnight.
3. Use a metal can to scoop up the mixture and dribble it onto soil where dogs are likely to dig or lie. You can also use this formula to discourage dogs that are intent on rearranging your compost heap. When the compost is turned and you want it left alone, sprinkle it thoroughly with Dog-Gone Potion.

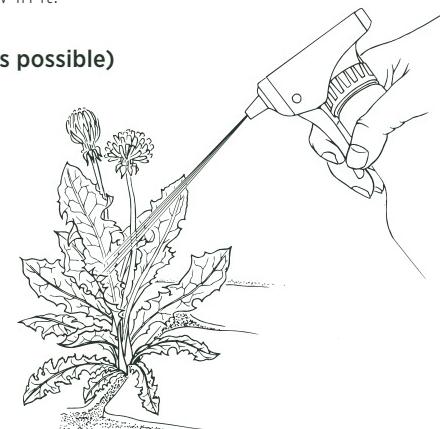
## Pickle Weeds to Death

If you're tired of hand-pulling broad-leaved weeds such as henbit and dandelion from your lawn, you can thwart them with a well-placed shot of vinegar. Take care not to splash it on the turf or any plants you'd like to keep, because vinegar will kill grassy plants, as well. It even kills bermudagrass in the cracks and crevices of sidewalks, and its acidifying effect on the soil can keep bermudagrass from coming back for up to an entire year. Carry a section of newspaper or a piece of cardboard with you when you're dousing weeds with vinegar. Use it to shield desirable plants when you need to spray weeds growing near them. And don't get carried away with this weed treatment—repeated applications of vinegar will acidify the soil so that nothing will grow in it.

**Vinegar (as close to 10% acidity as possible)**

**Dishwashing liquid (optional)  
Pump spray bottle**

1. Fill the spray bottle with undiluted vinegar (or mix 3 parts vinegar to 1 part dishwashing liquid).
2. Spray in a narrow stream, dousing the weed's leaves and crown (the area at the base of the plant).
3. Rinse the sprayer well with water, especially if it has metal parts, because vinegar is corrosive.



To kill broad-leaved weeds in sidewalk cracks or other places, a simple spray of vinegar on their leaves and crowns should do the trick. Be careful not to splash vinegar on plants that you want to keep.

# Clever Containers, Countertop Creations, and Kitchen Castoffs

**B**erry baskets, meat trays, ice cream buckets, and more—food arrives in our kitchens in containers so sturdy there must be some other use for them once they're empty. It's only fair that the food containers find new lives in the garden, where they sometimes help us grow more food. Discover unusual purposes for everyday items from your kitchen and surprising ways to recycle things you thought you'd just throw away.

## Barricade Bulbs with Buried Baskets

Keep voles and other burrowing bulb biters from chewing on a prized lily, amaryllis, or tulip bulb without paying a cent for protective gear. All you have to do is remember to save plastic mesh baskets from the grocery store, and to place one bulb in each basket when planting. The mesh forms a barrier on the bottom and sides and limits access for hungry critters.

## Berry Baskets Block Bird Beaks and Bunnies

Birds enjoy the vegetable garden just as much as humans do. But birds don't always wait for the veggies to mature. They just help themselves the minute they spy those tender seedlings. Use the plastic mesh baskets to protect newly sprouted seedlings such as corn, cucumbers, melons, and squash from birds. By the time the seedlings are tall enough to reach through the tops of the baskets, it's safe to remove them because the plants are no longer as tender and delectable as the birds prefer. The baskets also provide a temporary barrier against nibbling rabbits and voles.

## Ice Cream to Keep Your Garden Clean

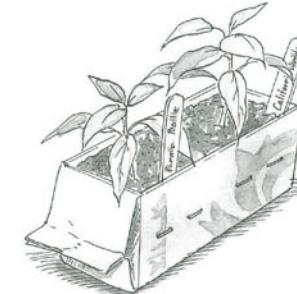
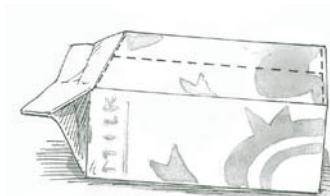
Instead of stuffing your pockets with broken glass, old plant tags, and other garden trash, save your trousers and give yourself a reason to buy a big tub of ice cream. Keep a 1-gallon plastic container in your garden or hanging from the handle

of your cart or wheelbarrow, and use it to collect all those trashy tidbits that turn up in the garden when you're turning the soil. Install a second tub near your compost bin to hold produce stickers, plastic forks, and other items that won't decompose.

## Cart Plants in Modified Cartons

Generous gardeners love sharing their plants, but they often wind up short of pots to hold their pass-alongs. If you have plants to share but no pots to spare, turn an empty half-gallon cardboard milk or juice carton into a nifty waterproof plant transporter.

Cut the carton lengthwise down the center on one side, then across the ends. Fold the resulting flaps inside the carton and staple them to the sides, then poke a few drainage holes in the bottom. Fill it up



Modified milk or juice cartons make it easy to share plants with friends without the expense of containers or the clutter of returned empty pots.

## RECYCLE THIS! *This Sifter's Sitting Pretty*

**R**emove the seat from an old straight-legged metal kitchen chair to make a compost sifter. Build a wood-framed box with a wire mesh bottom and attach it where the seat of the chair used to be. Dump compost into the box and shake the chair to work it through the sifter.

If an old chair doesn't suit your sifting needs but you still want to recycle it, turn it into a plant stand by fitting a suitably sized pot into the place where the seat once sat.



Transform an old dinette chair or stool into a compost sifter with legs. You don't have to hold the sifter as you work, and you can easily move it to wherever you want to use the finished compost.

with potting soil and plants, and spread the joy of gardening without worrying about unreturned pots.

### Sticky Styrofoam Makes a Trap in a Snap

There's nothing elaborate about this simple but effective trap for pesky flea beetles. Use a small Styrofoam plate or a piece of Styrofoam packaging that's roughly 6 × 6 inches. Attach it to a stake with some duct tape, coat it with Tangle-Trap or a thick layer of petroleum jelly, then push the stake into the soil with the plate sticking up like a big lollipop.

Tuck a few of these traps around crops that flea beetles favor, such as eggplant and cabbage; replace the sticky Styrofoam with a new trap when it gets gunked up with beetles and windblown dirt. Painting the trap yellow will attract the most beetles, but unpainted traps work, too.

### Baby Your Garden with Compost Bottles

Turn a 2-liter plastic soda bottle into a season-long source of nutrients for your garden. Cut off the top of the bottle at the shoulders, where it goes from curved to straight, and drill five or six small ( $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch) holes in the bottom. Fill the bottle about three-quarters full with compost, and bury it in the soil between plants so that just the cut rim of the bottle is visible at the soil surface. Fill each compost bottle with water, which will gradually filter down through the compost and drain out into the soil to give your garden a mild nutrient boost each time you water.

### Bottle Rings “Pop” Transplant Troubles

To discourage squirrels from digging up new transplants, turn 1- and 2-liter plastic

soda bottles into protective collars for your plants. With a utility knife, slice each bottle horizontally into 3-inch-wide rings. Slip a ring around the stem of each new transplant, pushing the edge of the plastic into the soil just enough to hold it firmly in place. To protect plants that are too large to slip the rings over, slit the plastic rings open and stretch each one carefully around a plant's base, then pull the ends back together.

Squirrels may scratch around the edges of the plastic rings, but they won't dig up your new transplants. After a week or so they'll lose interest entirely, then you can remove the rings and use them to guard other plants. Even if squirrels aren't a concern where you live, you can still use the rings to keep cutworms, slugs, and other undesirables from getting to tender young plant stems.

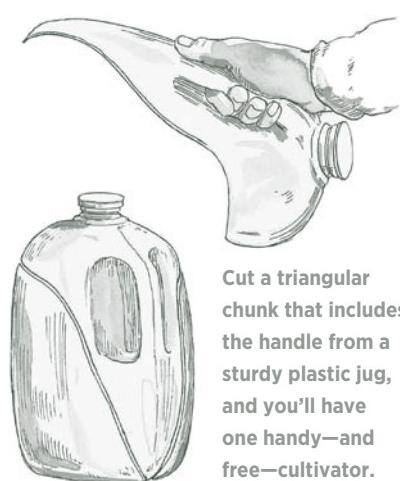
### “Flap” Your Jugs to Foil Fly-Aways

Covering cold-sensitive transplants with gallon-size plastic jugs is a popular way to encourage growth and prevent frost damage early in the season. But



Turn the bottom of a gallon plastic jug into a hinged flap to hold it in place in your garden.

lightweight jugs are prone to blowing away in spring breezes, leaving your plants unprotected and your neighbors irate about the windborne junk. Instead of completely removing the bottom of each jug to turn it into a minigreenhouse, cut it away on just three sides and fold it outward on the fourth to create a hinged flap. When you place a jug over one of your plants, weigh down the flap with a large rock or a mound of soil. It won't leave your garden until you want it to. As the danger of frost diminishes in the spring, you may want to make a larger hole in the top of the jug by cutting around the spout and removing it. This makes watering easier and lets more light reach the young plant inside.

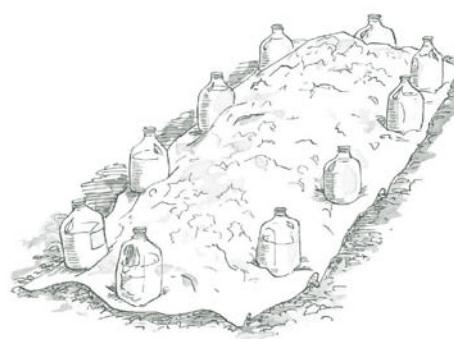


Cut a triangular chunk that includes the handle from a sturdy plastic jug, and you'll have one handy—and free—cultivator.

### Jug-Handle Cultivator

A cut-up plastic jug works as a shallow cultivator. Cut a triangular shape from the handle side of the jug, leaving enough plastic to provide a good stiff edge. Make it long enough to get a little of the bottom curve. With the handle still attached, it works as a small hoe for those little weeds that get in between plants. In a pinch it also doubles as a funnel or as a small shovel or scraper for planting.

Since you're cutting so much of the jug away to make this cultivator, don't let the scraps go to waste. Use the remaining portion as a cloche to protect young transplants.



Save gallon plastic jugs from milk, water, or juice, and fill them with water to make weights to keep your row covers in place. When it's time to remove the row covers, you can use the weights to water your plants.

### Weight in the Spring, Water Later On

Here's an easy way to keep floating row covers from wafting out of your garden. Fill gallon jugs with water nearly to the brim, replace the caps, and set the jugs on the edges of your row covers. Simply using a jug of water is often much easier than finding a suitably heavy rock when you need one. When it's time to take off the row covers, poke a

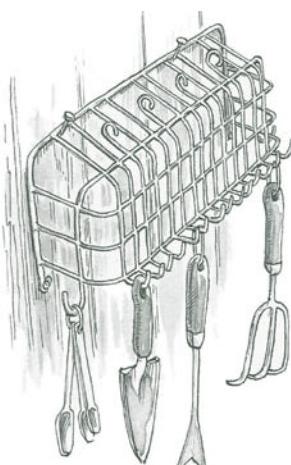
small hole in the bottom of each jug and set it near a plant that needs a long, gentle drink. Gather up the empty jugs and recycle them or refill them with water for "drip" irrigation throughout the growing season.

### Spice Up Small-Seed Sowing

To even up the distribution of small seeds such as lettuce for broadcast sowing, use a recycled herb or spice jar with a perforated top. Put your seeds in the clean, dry jar, and shake them out over your prepared planting bed.

### Bulbs Enjoy Net (Bag) Benefits

Save old potato, onion, or fruit bags—the ones made of netting with good air circulation. Use them to store bulbs that are not cold-hardy, such as dahlias and gladiolus, over the winter months, hanging them from the ceiling in a basement or a garage that remains above freezing. The bags are also good for keeping harvests of onions, shallots, or garlic from your garden well into winter.



A discarded wire dish rack cut in half can gain new life as a tool hanger. Tap a couple of nails into the shed or garage wall to hold the rack in place.

### RECYCLE THIS!

## Don't Throw Out the Towel

Dishcloths and towels too frayed and faded for further use in the kitchen still have plenty to give in the garden. Cut old towels into strips and use them as soft, stem-saving plant ties.

Keep a couple of old towels with your gardening tools. After rinsing away any clinging dirt on your tools, dry them with one towel. Then wipe the metal parts with the other towel moistened with a small amount of vegetable or mineral oil. Keep the oily towel in a zip-top storage bag until you need it again.

### Straighten Up and Handle Your Hang-Ups!

If you have an old wire dish draining rack, you have the makings of an instant shed organizer. Use wire cutters to cut the drainer in half lengthwise. Form the newly cut wires into hooks. Then mount the drainer on the garage or shed wall and hang tools from it. If you position the drainer with the cut side up, you have a basket that will hold gloves, seed packets, and other items that you can't hang.

### Deliver a Tidy Drink of Water

A squirt bottle or a sports-top water bottle offers an easy way to water houseplants without making a mess. Fill the bottle with water, then direct the water stream at

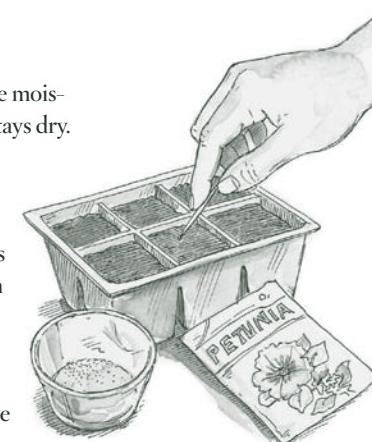
the plants' roots. The plants get the moisture they need, and the furniture stays dry.

### Toothpicks Thwart Cutworms

A simple toothpick is all it takes to protect a tender transplant from falling prey to cutworm injury. Cutworms feed by wrapping themselves around the stems of young plants. Because they're active at night, the first sign of cutworm damage usually is an entire garden bed of fallen transplants, each one girdled and cut off at soil level. To avoid this disheartening sight, place a toothpick against the stem of each transplant so that half of it is stuck into the soil and half is above the ground. The toothpick keeps the cutworm from being able to completely circle the plant's stem; the pest can't feed on and damage the plant.

### Sow Tiny Seeds Quick with Toothpick Trick

Use a plain old toothpick to sow hard-to-handle tiny flower and vegetable seeds. Empty the seed packet into a small bowl,



A light touch with a wet toothpick lets you pick up small seeds and deposit them onto moist soil.

then wet the end of a toothpick and use it to pick up a dry seed. When the seed touches moist soil, it's attracted to the wetter surface and practically plants itself.

### Two Ways to Foil Diseases

Shiny aluminum foil mulch can help foil viruses that afflict vegetables. And wrapping foil around plant stems can also deter fungal disease.

For a mulch, spread a 30-inch-wide strip of foil on the soil surrounding squash or tomatoes. The shimmer scares away aphids and thrips, which carry disfiguring, crop-reducing viruses.

### RECYCLE THIS!

## Old Rugs Bug Deer

If deer are damaging your garden, roll out the "unwelcome mat" and end their destructive dining. Deer dislike the feel of strange textures underfoot. Use old throw rugs, discarded carpet remnants, or old carpeting that's been replaced to surround your garden with a 4- to 6-foot path of unwanted floor coverings. When the deer encounter the carpet, they will turn around and seek their meals elsewhere.

You can use this method to protect fruit trees or susceptible landscape plants, too. Even better, once deer get out of the habit of feeding on your plants, they're less likely to return, even when snow covers the carpeting and hides its funny-feeling surface from their sensitive feet.

To deter southern blight on tomatoes and peppers, wrap foil around the plant stems, from 2 inches below the soil surface to 2 inches above. The foil serves as a physical barrier against the fungus.

## Maintain Moisture While You're Away

Traveling for business or pleasure doesn't need to spell doom for plants growing in clay containers, and you don't need to line up a plantsitter to tend your pots. Instead of worrying about plants in porous clay pots drying out while you're away, you can simply wrap each pot with aluminum foil. The foil helps hold in the moisture and keeps the pots damper for a longer period of time, so less watering is needed.

## Bag-Dry Herbs in the Fridge

Some leafy green herbs, such as parsley, dill, and basil, are slow to air-dry and generally lose their bright color during the process. Here's a better way to dry them.



Stuff herb stalks loosely into paper lunch bags, then label the bags and close them with clothespins. Place the bags of herb in a frost-free refrigerator. In a few days, the herbs will be perfectly dried, thanks to the refrigerator's dehumidifying action. You can leave the dried herbs in the fridge indefinitely. Tape the bags to the side of the refrigerator with masking tape to save space—or transfer the herbs to air-tight containers and store them in a cool, dark place.

### RECYCLE THIS!

## ***Everything and the Kitchen Sink***

A

kitchen overhaul produces a lot of "waste" material that can find new life in and around your garden.

- Salvage old drawers and turn them into mini raised beds or seedling flats. Drill a few drainage holes in the bottom of a drawer and fill it with potting soil to ready it for planting.
- Put a section of old countertop to work as a weather-resistant potting bench, or place it beneath an outdoor faucet to keep splashes and spills from making a mud hole there.
- Bring the old sink outside and put it near your garden and within reach of a hose to make a gardenside station for washing fresh-picked veggies.
- Use pieces of old flooring as splashguards beneath gutter downspouts; also lay large sections over spots where you want to get rid of sod to make new garden beds. Once the grass is dead, remove the carpet, and plant.

# *Scour your counter, pantry, cupboards, and cleaning closet for everyday items, and you can ...*



- Protect fruit with the jug of doom, page 8

- Battle squirrels with soda bottles, page 16

- Turn a chair into a nifty compost sifter, page 15
- And more!



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